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ABSTRACT

Describing the early reader as one who has learned to read informally at home before formal schooling has begun, this paper reviews the literature on two aspects of early reading. The first aspect considered is the home environment of the early reader and the interactions with his or her parents. The second aspect considered is the process by which early reading is acquired through such methods as listening to others read and beginning to write. (AKM)

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Early Readers: Preschool Children Who Learn To Read At Home

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INTRODUCTION

Research on the subject of early reading has taken many forms over the years. Methodology has varied considerably and even the definition of early reading has not remained constant. The term early reading has been used to mean preschool reading, kindergarten reading, beginning reading of any type, and reading readiness. Clearly, each of these areas has its own concerns and issues which may vary considerably. For the purposes of this paper, an early reader is defined as a child who learns to read before formal schooling has begun and who has learned to read informally at home. While help may have been given with reading in the home, this help was not of a formal, programmed nature.

This paper deals with two aspects of early reading. The first, a consideration of the characteristics of the early reader, his home environment, and his interactions with parents. The second, a discussion of the process by which early reading is acquired. It is hoped that this approach will lead to a fuller understanding of the early reader and his understanding of the reading process.

Early Readers: Preschool Children Who Learn to Read At Home

The child who learns to read before beginning school has been the subject of much research. This research has centered primarily upon the characteristics of the early reader and the characteristics of the home environment. Research has also been conducted comparing early readers with non-early readers in an attempt to identify more clearly characteristics or circumstances unique to the early reader.

Typically an early reader is discovered upon entrance to school. The parents, of course, know of the child's ability to read but usually there is no reason for reading ability to be recognized by others before formal schooling has begun. Researchers generally have availed themselves of this very accessible school population and, as a result, have studied early readers as they enter the school system. This technique has been quite useful as it has provided the formal framework and consistency with which to study these early readers over a long period of time. The drawback of this technique is the obvious lack of information on the early reader during the time reading was acquired and the reliance on personal memory accounts by parents and other family members two or three years after the events have transpired.

Generally, the populations of early readers studied have been quite small and the methods used to identify readers have varied. The largest studies of early readers were the longitudinal studies done by Durkin (1966). The first study was done in Oakland, California and identified 49 early readers from a population of 5,103 entering first grade students. Children taught any reading during kindergarten were dropped from the study during the initial screening which may have eliminated some early readers. The

49 early readers studied were identified by means of a two-step screening procedure consisting of a word identification test and a score of Grade Level 1 on the Gates Reading Test (1958). The second study done by Durkin identified, by means of a similar two-step screening process, a total of 156 early readers from a total population of 4,465 in 40 New York City public schools.

Plessas and Oakes (1964) identified 20 early readers by means of a score of 2.0 on the California Reading Test which was administered in December of first grade. No attempt was made in this study to identify children who had been taught reading in kindergarten, although an attempt was made to identify those children who were reading upon entrance to first grade. (This would insure that the early readers had learned to read before first grade, rather than in the first half of the school year).

Clark (1976) identified 32 early readers from an entering population of selected schools in the British Isles. The chronological age of these children was from under 5 to 6.5. These early readers were identified by a two-step process using the Schonell Graded Reading Test (oral reading of words in isolation) and the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (Comprehension). Children were considered to be early readers if they were able to display a fluency in reading (a reading range of 7.5 years to 11+ years was determined for this group by these tests).

Briggs and Elkind (1977) identified 33 children from an entering kindergarten population of 2,700 by means of a two-step procedure similar to Durkin's. This population, however, was different than Durkin's because kindergarten children were studied by Briggs and Elkind, rather than first graders.

In drawing conclusions from these studies of early readers, it is

important to consider the variance in age, grade, and previous school exposure to reading. In addition, methods used to determine which children were early readers must be considered. In spite of these methodological differences, however, some common factors can be noted and some generalizations can be made.

Most striking about these groups of children is the level of reading ability with which they began school. These children were not merely reading isolated words: they were truly quite fluent. Clark, for example, reports a reading range of 7.5 years to 11+ years for her population of early readers at the onset of the study. All of these children were reading both fiction and non-fiction books, and most could spell some words. Durkin's subjects also exhibited a great deal of fluency. In Oakland, for example, the reading grade range upon entrance to first grade is reported as 1.7 to 2.6. Interestingly, those children who sought and received preschool help with reading at age 3 (13 children) entered the study with the highest reading level (grade 2.6) in May of 1958. At the conclusion of the study in May, 1963, these children achieved a grade level of 9.2. The majority (22 children) of the early readers began at age 4 and entered first grade with a reading level of 1.8 and reached a level of 6.6. Those who began at age 5 (14 children) began at a grade level of 1.7 and concluded the study with a grade level of 7.6. Clearly, these children not only were fluent readers upon entrance to school; they maintained reading levels at or above grade level.

Superior intelligence is often assumed in the presence of such early fluency in reading. Durkin reports a median IQ of 121 (range 91-161) for the Oakland population and a median IQ of 133 (range 82-170) for the New York group (revised Stanford-Binet, 1937) Plessas and Oakes report a mean IQ of 128; Briggs and Elkind, a mean of 115.5 (each measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children). Clark reports a mean IQ of 122.5 (WISC)

with a range of 98-146 and somewhat higher scores on the Stanford-Binet. When considered in terms of measures of central tendency, these populations are certainly above average in intelligence; however, it is interesting to note that the range of scores, when reported, indicates the presence of scores at considerably lower levels. Clearly, not all early readers are above average in intelligence. Durkin theorizes that these early readers may benefit considerably as they are able to learn to read slowly over a time period of years with a minimum of pressure rather than having to learn to read in a few short months of first grade.

In general, many children who are early readers do have high IQ's. The relationship between IQ and early reading is complex and centers on the question of whether early reading is caused by a high IQ or is a high IQ score caused by early reading and related language abilities

> . . . Intelligence tests are being questioned as measures of innate ability and the extent to which they are a combination of innate potential and environmental enrichment must be considered. (Clark, p. 23)

It is difficult, at this time, to assess the relationship between IQ, home environment, and early reading, although there does seem to be a strong relationship among these factors.

The environment of early readers has been quite extensively researched. This data, however, is basically correlational in design and no causal relationship has been proven between environment and early reading. In addition, this data has been compiled almost solely on the basis of parent interview or questionnaire. Thus, such factors as accuracy of memory of past events and interviewer bias may influence the results of these surveys.

Teale (1978) has identified four environmental factors which have been repeatedly associated with early reading. This interpretation, which relies

heavily upon Durkin and Clark, includes the following factors: (1) An availability and range of printed materials in the environment. These materials include books, newspapers, workbooks, and print in the environment (signs, labels, etc.); (2) Reading is "done" in the environment. This factor includes the fact that the children were frequently read to by parents and siblings and, also, that those in the environment consider reading important and are readers, themselves; (3) The environment facilitates contact with paper and pencil; and (4) Those in the environment respond to what the child is trying to do.

Both Clark and Durkin indicate that the responsiveness of those in the environment of the early reader is of great importance. The quality and richness of parent-child interactions is frequently cited by these researchers. Durkin says of these parents that:

> . . . the homes they provide, the example they show, the time they give to the children, their concepts of their role as educator of the pre-school child - all of these dimensions of home life and of parent-child relationships appeared to be of singular importance to the early reading achievement. (p. 138)

In addition, the help parents gave to their children was very artfully timed. Of the 32 children in Clark's study, 25 first received help from their parents as a result of the child's direct questioning. In Durkin's New York study, for 25 of 30 children in the experimental group, parent-help with reading came in response to the child's questions. Clearly, these children were actively seeking help and their parents were perceptive enough to give that help at the moment it would be most effective. In Durkin's Oakland Study, 38 (of a total of 49) subjects had parents who did not deliberately plan to teach them to read early. It was the "overt curiosity" shown by these children which resulted in parental help. In these cases:

> . . . the actual amount of help given . . . depended upon the frequency and the persistence of the children's questions - and upon the patience and free time of people in their families. (Durkin, p. 55)

For these early readers, then, learning to read was virtually self-programmed. For them, it was apparently an ideal way to learn.

The environments and interactions described by researchers appeal to our intuitive sense of what the homes of early readers should be like. These are "good" homes, rich in materials, and supportive of reading. Unfortunately, this description can be an oversimplification of the facts. How do we account for the fact that many children also live in "good" homes and, yet, they are not early readers? Sometimes, these non-early readers are even siblings of early readers. How can we account for this difference? Are the environments and parent-child interactions, perhaps subtly, different? How are early readers, themselves, different from non-early readers? Research on comparisons of early readers and non-early readers gives us some interesting, perhaps contradictory, answers.

Durkin, in her New York Study, set up an experimental group of 30 early readers (randomly selected) and matched (by IQ and teacher) this group to a group of 30 non-early readers. Durkin had found in her Oakland study that parents had frequently characterized their early readers as "persistent" and "perfectionistic". She was curious to see how the parents in this second study would characterize their children. Would there be personality or other differences between the groups? Durkin found that the personality traits of the early readers and non-early readers as given in parent interviews were very similar for the two groups. In addition, Teacher Rating Scales, Bender Gestalt Tests, and Minnesota Tests of Creative Thinking also suggested that early readers and non-early readers are very similar. In short, little

difference existed in the two groups of children. Durkin did, however, find many differences in parental factors for the two groups. It was found, for example, that more mothers of early readers were college graduates, mothers of early readers, themselves, read more than the average, more mothers of early readers regularly read to their children, more mothers of early readers thought it appropriate for parents to teach reading at home. In addition, more parents of early readers than non-early readers gave help with printing, identification of written words, and the meaning of words, spelling, and the sound of letters. We have previously seen that this help was prompted by questions and overt curiosity on the part of the child. But, didn't the non-early reader show any of the curiosity present in the early reader? Durkin (1966) indicates that the non-early reader was interested. One-third of the total control group of 30 showed pre-school interest in reading and apparently received little or no reinforcement from their environment. Non-early reader parents cited attitudes against pre-school reading fostered by the school and a fear on the part of the parents that early reading would lead to eventual boredom for the child upon entrance to school.

Therefore, Durkin demonstrates that it is home environment rather than the characteristics of the particular child that is causative in early reading behavior. Other researchers, however, have pointed to some possible differences between early readers and non-early readers. This does not negate the effect of environment on early reading. Rather, it increases our knowledge of the reader.

Briggs and Elkind's (1973, 1977) findings on the environments of early readers compared to the environments of non-early readers are quite comparable, in most respects, to Durkin's. However, Briggs and Elkind (1977) unexpectedly found that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the

factor termed "Child Interest in Learning to Read". (This is not completely in disagreement with Durkin when it is considered, in light of Durkin's finding, that both early readers and non-early readers showed curiosity about words and reading). Parents of early readers in the Briggs and Elkind study also showed a higher level of "Parent Achievement Orientation".

Early readers in the Briggs and Elkind study (1977) showed a high level of operativity. (These researchers believe possession of Concrete Operation to be necessary to reading skill learning). Unfortunately, methodological problems involving the time of testing exist in this study. A delay of several months, particularly in testing for Concrete Operation, may be significant. It was also found that the early readers scored significantly higher than their controls on two subtests of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA). These were the subtests for Auditory Closure and Sound Blending.

Clark (1976) does not specifically deal with a control group of non-early readers in her research. Her comments about comparisons of early readers and non-early readers are, however, most perceptive. Clark, while subscribing wholeheartedly to environmental theories of early reading behavior quite similar to Durkin's, also implies that the child who becomes an early reader is, in many ways, different from the non-early reader. In parent interviews, the question of the differences between siblings who had read early and those who had not was raised. These parent interviews, in which behavior was retrospectively discussed, indicated that the early readers were different in personality and approach to their non-early reader siblings. The early readers were, in general, more able to amuse themselves, more concentrated and engrossed in tasks, and had less need for others' company.

For the early readers, reading came easily. One mother said that for the

early reader "it just clicked" while her other children (who learned to read in school) seemed to have to really work at sounding out words, etc. (Clark, 1976, p. 93). The non-early reader who came from the same environment as the early reading sibling, may well have also been at an advantage, Clark theorizes, but because of different personalities and interests may have done well in areas other than reading.

These individual interests and aptitudes of the early reader were highlighted upon administration of several testing procedures. Upon administration of the Stanford Binet IQ test, "successes were frequently in tests involving memory for language". (Clark, 1976, p. 23) (These subtests include digits, digits reversed, naming days of the week, memory for sentences, and rhymes). On the ITPA, the early readers also scored very high on subtests involving language memory (Auditory Sequential Memory, Grammatic Closure, and Auditory Association).

> . . . Auditory memory for sounds in sequence, and tasks, involving completion in a language context, are the areas in which the group, as a whole, appear to be particularly successful. It is not possible to determine whether, or to what extent, the success in these subtests caused, or resulted from their early success in reading. (Clark, 1976, p. 29)

Visual input subtests of the WISC and ITPA were not an area of great strength for the group and the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt indicated that the early readers had varying levels of visuo-motor coordination. This variation of testing results between auditory memory tasks and visual tasks points to the clear strength of the group in auditory and language memory tasks.

There apparently was also a difference in the way the early readers approached testing situations and tasks. Clark administered the Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test (1958) to the early readers (total 32) and to a group of 197 non-early readers. All of the early readers were able to achieve valid

scores on the Wepman and many did quite well. Most importantly, the early readers were able to complete the test. In the group of 197 non-early readers, only 81 were able to achieve valid scores on the Wepman. Clearly, more than just the simple ability to discriminate sounds is dealt with in the Wepman. Clark suggests that other factors, such as interest, motivation, significance of the task, articulation, and vocabulary play a part in the testing situation. And, while auditory discrimination is neither the cause or the effect of early reading, the ability to complete a highly language-related task is significant. The test and the task involved had a meaning to the early readers which was apparently not that obvious to the non-early reader.

> . . . It is, yet, further evidence of the awareness of these children who are fluent readers of the discriminations which are of significance in the language context in which they are rapidly developing such fluency. (Clark, 1976, p. 38)

The profile of the early reader presented by Clark is perhaps the most intricate, in that it covers a wider range of variables than the other studies. Clark characterizes the early reader's particular strengths as being "his powers of concentration, his memory for sounds in sequence, his precocious language development, and his motivation". (p. 105) Clearly, the young child with these characteristics is benefitted greatly by a supportive and stimulating environment.

The early reader has been fairly well described in the literature. Many characteristics have been attributed to him by parents, teachers, and researchers; and the environment of the early reader has been thoroughly studied. In all these queries, however, one very vital question remains unanswered - what is the actual process by which an early reader learns to read? Much has been implied by researchers, and theorists have attempted to explain the process.

Durkin found that one-half of the early readers studied were also early writers whose interests in writing preceded, or occurred simultaneously with interest in reading. This early writing is frequently mentioned by researchers and Durkin suggests that early writers may learn to read through a language arts approach.

> . . . For these 'pencil and paper kids', the learning sequence moved from (a) scribbling and drawing, to (b) copying objects and letters of the alphabet, to (c) questions about spelling, to (d) ability to read. (Durkin, 1966, p. 137)

The questions about spelling directed to responsive parents frequently resulted in specific help with letter sounds. In addition, Durkin's early writers often went through interest binges during which children would copy such materials as lists and directories. This may have aided whole word identification.

Chomsky (1971) suggests that reading first, then writing, is an unnatural and artificial sequence. Chomsky believes that a child can learn in a much more active way by using invented spellings of meaningful words which a child then learns to read. These words, which may be written or created with plastic letters or blocks, reflects the child's own linguistic organization, pronunciation, and experiences. "What better way to <u>read</u> for the first time than to try recognizing the very word you have carefully built up on the table in front of you?" (Chomsky, p. 296)

In both Durkin and Chomsky's works, a point is reached when the writing process is internalized and the child begins to read. This internalization process is undetailed in either author's work but seems to be the key point in the process of learning to read for these early writers. Clearly, however, great numbers of early readers do learn to read by writing (or in conjunction

with writing). This multi-sensory approach appears to quite successfully reinforce developing skills in a broad language context.

Within the past decade, the creation of television programs geared specifically to teaching pre-reading and reading skills has exposed large segments of the preschool population to reading. Sesame Street has in its curriculum such skills a letter names, sounds, verbal blending, rhyming, matching words, and recognition of sight words (Gibbon, 1975). The Electric Company, with its direct focus on reading, reading attitudes, and behaviors, is also frequently watched by preschoolers. It is debatable whether a child could learn to read by watching these programs. It appears, however, that these programs may be an important element in the process of learning to read for the early reader as they reinforce developing skills. They may also serve as a subject for discussion between parent and child about certain words, skills, and topics and may make preschool reading more acceptable in our society. In addition, television programming may serve as a motivating force for reading (Durkin, 1966) and for learning to write (Hall, 1976).

It has been reported throughout the literature that early readers are frequently read to by their parents, siblings and other relatives (Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; Plessas and Oakes, 1964; Price, 1976; Briggs and Elkind, 1973 and 1977). This phenomenon may give us the greatest insight into how early readers learn to read. Within the story reading process, there may exist a special set of circumstances by which the child, as an active participant, begins to understand the reading situation and process and, in effect, teaches himself to read. This is not to suggest that reading takes place independent of other variables - certainly all of the motivating factors, personality characteristics, and environmental circumstances previously discussed are of great importance. These other factors, however, all contribute to that moment when "it just clicked" (Clark, 1976) and the child is able to read.

Many theoretical explanations have been purposed for the relationship between story reading and success in reading in general. Most of these theories deal with the emotional warmth of the reading situation, the positive reinforcement which leads to the enjoyment of books, and the opportunity for language enhancement. Schickedanz (1978) states that these theories:

> . . . stress the importance of motivation and reinforcement derived externally from the learning act itself. In addition, they assume that story reading serves as preparation for instruction in reading that is to occur at some later time, not that it is itself a situation in which actual instruction can and does occur. (p. 49)

In particular, Schickedanz feels that letter-sound associations can be learned from the story reading situation. This is not to suggest that theories which state the affective values of story reading are not valid, rather, these theories are incomplete.

The importance of Schickedanz's observations is great when considering the process by which early readers learn to read. The two allied concepts that the child is an active participant in the story reading situation, and that learning to read in this context is likely, give us a plausible explanation for how much early reading is acquired. Schickedanz presents a cognitive explanation of how letter-sound associations develop. In Scheme I, the reader presents the story line to the child who, upon repetition of the story, is able to memorize that story. At this point, the child is able to make the generalization that stories can be learned "by heart" and applies this to other books. In Scheme II, a child recognizes certain words in books because parents have pointed them out or they associate them with pictures or other clues. Their "by heart" versions of stories help them do this also. This reading is "by sight". In Scheme III, the child begins to observe

specific letter-sound correspondences and patterns of correspondence. This stage represents a departure from Scheme I and II, in that a child is no longer dependent upon a story reader. In this stage, children construct a set of skills for themselves rather than being taught a hierarchy of skills.

The hypothetical behavior presented in Schickedanz's theoretical model is verified in research studies of early readers. Durkin (1966) found that "Stories which were read and re-read were generally the ones that led to such questions as 'Where does it say that?', or 'What's that word?" (p.137) Memorization of story lines and the need for repetition of stories are frequently seen in Clark's study as well. Clark (1976) notes

> . . . the existence of children, such as those in the present research, must lead us to question to what extent and in what ways learning to read is a developmental process and whether there are essential sequential steps. (p. 104)

It may be, in fact, that the traditional sequential steps by which we teach reading have little relationship to the system produced by the child in a story reading situation. It also appears that the memorization of story lines and the repetition of the same stories may be at the very heart of the learning process for the early reader.

It has been theorized that the knowledge of written language is acquired in much the same way knowledge of oral language is acquired. (Hoskisson, 1979) Söderbergh (1977) believes that "between two and four, the very time when the spoken language is acquired, the child has an extraordinary capacity that makes the breaking of the code a natural and easy thing". (p. 113) It also has been suggested by Söderbergh that this capacity diminishes after the age of four at which time the ability to discover for

oneself the code also diminishes. Söderbergh states also that "the remarkable need for linguistic repetition in early childhood disappears later on and so does the fabulous capacity for memorizing". (p. 35)

These linguistic concepts and their connection with early reading are expanded by Hoskisson (1979) who believes children can learn to read "naturally". Children, in fact, learn to speak naturally by constructing the grammar of their language over time. "Language is learned in context; it is not detached from the environment and structured in bits and pieces". (p. 490) The child discovers the "categories, rules, and interrelationships" of the language and abstracts linguistic structures from the language in which he is immersed. Children who are learning to read "naturally" discover the categories, rules, and interrelationships of written language in the same way they came to understand spoken language. "They alone can determine what they can assimilate and accommodate with their current cognitive structures". (p. 490) The parents provide experiences with written language but only the child can determine what fits into his individual cognitive system.

> . . . Children must test their own hypotheses about the written language, and to do so they must first hear the written language and make their judgments about what they can or cannot relate to their own hypotheses and theories of the written language. Children must interact with written language and solve the problem of learning to read themselves. (pp. 490-491)

In the process of learning to read naturally, as outlined by Hoskisson, parents first read to young children and let children handle and play with books. In doing this, children gain a sense of spatial realtionships of books, of behaviors associated with the reading situation, and of the importance

of pictures as representations of abstract experiences.

At this stage, the children relate pictures to what is being read and begin "tuning in" to the words. Children then want to hear the same stories repeated over and over again and "memorize" the stories. Any change in the reading of the story or skipping of parts results in instant correction by the child because the child's flow of thought has been disrupted. Children are then able to "read" the story to themselves using memory aided by the physical context of the pictures.

In explanation for this memory phenomenon, Hoskisson suggests . . . "that children possess . . . an auditory version of the 'photographic memory' . . . Such auditory 'imagery' is a vivid perceptual recall of sounds in which linguistic experience can be perceptually revived minutes, hours, or even days after first being sensed". (1979, p. 494)

Hoskisson believes that while reading to children, parents should have children repeat words and phrases after they are read and that this may aid auditory imagery and memorization. This is the first stage in a system developed by Hoskisson known as "Assisted Reading". During this stage, memorization occurs. Hoskisson theorizes that "it is during this memorization phase that children must be working out what words are". (p. 495)

In the second stage of assisted reading, the readers leave out some words and the children are able to fill in the blanks maintaining a smooth flow of reading. "It must be that memorization provides the transition . . . to stage two . . . Children begin to recognize words from book to book after they have had numerous stories repeated over and over again". (p. 495) In the last stage of assisted reading, the child is able to do the reading and the adult fills in any unknown words to maintain a smooth flow. Children who learn to read in this way must read a variety of books and must read

many of them over and over again so that words are seen in different contexts to insure their recognition.

Hoskisson's description of the reading process, especially with its strong emphasis on the auditory imagery and memorization phenomena, may explain how many early readers develop. As we have seen, memorization of stories is frequently discussed in theoretical accounts and documented in actual research studies. Auditory memory has, in addition, been shown to be a strong characteristic when testing early readers (Clark, 1976; Briggs and Elkind, 1977). It is not clear, however, whether the auditory memory strengths discovered in these studies existed prior to the onset of reading, or if they developed as a result of early reading. Therefore, the role of auditory memory function is still unclear, although both Schikedanz and Hoskisson suggest it exists prior to reading. This is an area which warrants further research.

Another undeveloped area exists in the work of Schickedanz and Hoskisson. In each theory, reading behavior is internalized and the child is able to read familiar books. The next step in this process is the transfer of this ability to unfamiliar texts. This area is not well-documented and may, in fact, leave out some intermediary step. At what point and in what ways do children arrive at this ability to recognize words in varying contexts? Early readers have clearly developed this ability but how, when, and at what rate is unclear. Also unclear is the question of whether whole words or phonic elements are transferred.

In spite of these unanswered questions, Schickedanz, Hoskisson, Durkin and Clark give us tremendous insight into the story reading situation. Clearly, for certain children, story reading is a means of learning to read, and memory and auditory functions are important elements of this situation.

These are areas which demand further investigation if we are truly to understand the early reader.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research that exists on the subject of early reading has attempted primarily to define and characterize the early reader and his environment. The work of Durkin (1966) has most successfully achieved these ends because of the methodological care taken and, also, the personal insight offered by Durkin. Both the Oakland and New York studies are carefully designed and implemented. In addition, a relatively large population of early readers is represented. These early readers were studied over a period of years and a means was devised to compare early readers and non-early readers. Home environment was studied by parent interviews which were thoroughly and painstakingly carried out. The results of these studies are reported in a clear and readable manner.

Durkin presents us many insights and personal observations on the early reader and the home. These observations generally serve to highlight and expand upon research findings. Unfortunately, this very valuable asset of Durkin's writing is also the most troublesome, for Durkin's conclusions are as much the result of subjective impression as of research data. Durkin's key findings concerning positive environments and parent-child interaction are based primarily on parent interviews conducted and reported by Durkin who fully acknowledges their subjective nature. This is not to deny the validity of Durkin's conclusions. It may be, in fact, that home environment and the quality of parent-child relationship are extremely significant or even causative in early reading behavior. This conclusion, however, combined with Durkin's inability to find clear-cut personality differences between early readers and non-early readers, or specific personality characteristics of early readers at all, places a great deal of the burden of proof on interview impressions and opinion.

Clark's (1976) research, which deals with a fairly small population, is

generally not as methodologically thorough as Durkin's. Clark, who acknowledges Durkin's efforts, comes to many of the same conclusions concerning home environment. These conclusions are based on the same type of parent interview and suffer from the same flaws. Clark does, however, go further in an attempt to understand the early reader in terms of personality. To accomplish this, a wider range of testing instruments was used. Not surprisingly, Clark is able to describe the early reader more clearly. It is unfortunate, given these findings, that Clark did not set up a specific structure in which to compare early readers and non-early readers.

Much of the other literature on early reading is more limited than Durkin (Plessas and Oakes , 1964), or seriously methodologically flawed (Briggs and Elkind,1977). These studies tend to offer little that is not dealt with in Durkin or Clark and, in general, are not as useful and offer little that is new on the subject.

Much of what we learn from the literature on early reading is very compatible with conventional wisdom. It is hardly surprising that early readers are generally bright, inquisitive children who are interested in reading and who come from "good" homes. To many, these conclusions would seem obvious. It is necessary to go beyond the obvious if we are to truly understand the early reader. This is why examination of the actual acquisition of reading skill is so necessary. In this area, research is neither extensive or empirical.

Chomsky (1971), Schickedanz (1978), and Hoskisson (1979) offer models for the beginning reading process which are very useful. The concept of the child as an active participant in the learning process, who constructs his own knowledge of written language, is vital and refreshing. The idea that a child can learn to read in everyday situations without formal programs, or expensive instructional material is very appealing. It seems likely that many early readers do learn to read

in just these ways and that our knowledge of these situations is limited.

We know little about the specific characteristics or skills a child brings to a story reading situation which enable that particular child to learn to read. These characteristics or skills are most probably the ultimate difference between early readers and non-early readers. Whether these skills are inborn or acquired is unknown. There is much reason to believe that many of these necessary skills involve memory for language. These skills may include facets of auditory imagery discussed by Hoskisson and, more generally, repetition and memorization of stories. This need for repetition and memorization appears to be virtually universal among early readers and has often been described in the literature.

Unfortunately, any attempt to isolate specifically related skills is complicated by researchers choice of testing instrument. Briggs and Elkind (1977) and Clark (1976) each found a specific area of strength in certain subtests of the ITPA for early readers. For Briggs and Elkind, these were the subtests for Auditory Closure and Sound Blending; for Clark, the subtests were Auditory Sequential Memory, Grammatic Closure, and Auditory Association. The ITPA, however, has been questioned as a measure of psycholinguistic abilities and has been frequently criticized in terms of design, norming, reliablity, and validity. It has been suggested that "more appropriate measures of language behavior in children are available". (Buros, p. 431) Also, such measures might add more to our knowledge if testing were done on a preschool population containing early readers rather than the usual entering school population.

Many recommendations can be drawn from the research on early reading. Research on home environment and parent-child interaction, in particular, is quite useful in providing guidelines for dealing with young children. The emphasis in the research on the responsive nature of the adults in early reader's

lives is particularly valuable and noteworthy. Certainly, all areas of development would be enhanced by such responsiveness. In such situations, early reading seems to be a by-product of the relationship rather than the goal.

It is also important when considering the development of the early reader, that we encourage understanding of this ability in all aspects of the environment. The school, in particular, must be responsive to the needs of the child who enters school reading. These children must be given a challenging program that encourages growth in all areas. Parents and educators, alike, must learn to respect different styles of learning and strategies employed by the early reader. Some children, for example, may have come to reading by writing and may still prefer this type of learning situation. As far as possible, within a group setting, each child should be accommodated and challenged in a personally meaningful way which allows for growth.

Finally, there seems to be a need for continued research on the early reader. Specifically, this research should be addressed to a younger population than has been previously studied. Because of the retrospective nature of the earlier major studies, little information is available about the linguistic and cognitive structures of early readers as they learn to read. Admittedly, preschool children are difficult to locate and test but such attempts could be most productive.

It seems likely that further knowledge of the early reading process would give us insight into the beginning reading process, in general, and may have effects upon remediation for less able school age readers. The early reader is able to learn to read outside of the traditional school system and techniques used by the early reader may be employable by others in need of alternative techniques. In addition, the fact that many story reading techniques are useful with older children (Hoskisson, 1979; Schickedanz, 1978) suggest that some

preschool learning situations may be adaptable to older children, as well. Thus, additional research done on early reading could benefit both the early reader and non-early reader alike and add much to our knowledge of the reading process.

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